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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5349
RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHOVQHS/COMSEVENTHFLT IMMEDIATE
INFO RHHMUNA/USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE 2291
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 0315
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE
RUEHRO/USMISSION UN ROME IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 MANILA 002098

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

BANGKOK FOR USAID /OFDA REGIONAL ADVISOR A. DWYER
USAID FOR DCHA/OFDA R. THAYER
USAID W/ FOR ANE/AA AND DCHA/FPP
GENEVA FOR N. KYLOH
USUN FOR OFDA REP
BRUSSELS FOR P. BROWN
ROME FOR USAID/OHA H. SPANOS
SECDEF FOR SOLIC
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR J3/J4/J5
PACOM FOR J3/J4/J5
NSC FOR P. MARCHAM

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: EAID SOCI PREL KPAO SENV EAGR RP
SUBJECT: U.S. UPS AID AS MANILA STRUGGLES WITH TROPICAL STORM ONDOY
AFTERMATH AND BRACES FOR SUPER TYPHOON

REFTELS: A) Manila 2089 B) Manila 2070 C) Manila 2056 D) Manila
2049 E) Manila 2046

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Even as Super Typhoon Pepeng (international name Parma) threatens the country anew, Philippine officials are struggling to cope with the over 400,000 displaced people and 293 deaths caused by tropical storm Ondoy (international name Ketsana). Agricultural losses, while significant, do not raise a food security risk. Philippine government agencies are working to ensure adequate supplies of food, other staples, and credit. The USG has allocated (through USAID) an additional \$1 million in humanitarian assistance. Additional U.S. personnel and equipment, diverted from previously scheduled joint Philippine-U.S. military exercises to relief efforts, are already providing on the ground. The Embassy has restored compound power and communications, and continues to engage local officials regarding the whereabouts of 30 American citizens who remain unaccounted-for. Media have extensively covered U.S aid and humanitarian efforts. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The number of known victims of tropical storm Ondoy (international name Ketsana) now stands at 293 fatalities and over 400,000 displaced individuals housed in 526 evacuation centers as of Friday, October 2, according to the Philippines' National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC). The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) have deployed over 8,000 soldiers for relief efforts in the Metro Manila area. Philippine police, fire and military personnel are conducting clean-up operations in major disaster-affected areas, and water and power services have been restored to most locales.

Presidential Palace as Relief Hub

¶3. (SBU) While major roadways have been cleared, many hard-hit areas east and southeast of central Manila remained flooded. Engineers with the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority faulted three pumping stations knocked out by the storm for the lingering water. This flooding, along with large scale property damage in areas where

waters have receded, has prevented over 400,000 flood victims from returning to their homes. Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) officials are struggling to feed and shelter the unprecedented number of evacuees, with newspapers reporting unruly crowds jockeying for food packs at hard-hit locations in Marikina (Metro Manila) and nearby Rizal province. In a well-publicized response to these logistical challenges President Arroyo moved 200 evacuees from an overcrowded evacuation center she visited to the Presidential Malacanang Palace grounds, which are already serving as a distribution hub for relief supplies. Philippine Secretary of National Defense Gilberto Teodoro announced that Philippine National Police units would patrol areas where looting of abandoned homes and automobiles had been reported.

Agricultural Damage

¶4. (SBU) While urban Manila suffered the brunt of the flooding, tropical storm Ondoy caused 3.6 billion pesos (\$75 million) of damage to the agricultural sector in surrounding provinces, including the loss of 180,000 tons of rice valued at 3.3 billion pesos (\$69 million), according to the Philippines' Department of Agriculture estimates. Fisheries (\$2.7 million), high value fruits and vegetables (\$2.6 million), corn (\$1.1 million) and livestock/poultry (\$0.6 million) were also affected. Paul Fernandez, the Acting Governor of Isabela province, the Philippines' top corn producer, told EconOff that although tropical storm Ondoy did minimal damage to the corn crop, 60 percent of the province's corn remained unharvested, making it vulnerable to the three low pressure systems now headed for Luzon. Unlike rice, the vast

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majority of corn plants do not survive extreme weather events according to Fernandez.

Government Caps Prices, May Intervene in Food Markets

¶5. (SBU) Philippine Secretary of Agriculture Arthur Yap announced that public National Food Authority (NFA) and private rice stocks exceeded two months of national consumption, allaying fears of shortages. The Philippines' Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), meanwhile, capped prices of food, cooking, and sanitary staples for 60 days. Department of Agriculture contacts tell us it will recommend various emergency measures to the executive branch to maintain food supplies. The NFA would procure from unaffected areas and release existing stocks of pork, chicken, vegetables and tilapia, and would also temporarily lift special agricultural safeguards duties on chicken.

Banks Offer Debt Relief

¶6. (SBU) In a media interview October 1, Deputy Governor Espenilla of the Philippine Central Bank appealed to banks to temporarily ease the burden on affected borrowers. In response, major private and public Philippine banks are offering to restructure loans and waive remittance fees for flood victims. Citibank announced a 30-day payment holiday for its credit card holders and personal loan borrowers who were affected by the storm.

U.S. Assistance

¶7. (SBU) In addition to the \$100,000 released to the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC) on September 29, USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) has allocated an additional \$1 million in emergency aid to the PNRC and other humanitarian organizations. An OFDA humanitarian supplies flight (Aleutian-70) is scheduled to arrive on Friday, October 2, with non-food relief items (water containers, hygiene kits and plastic sheeting) valued at \$390,000 and sufficient to assist 220,000 people. The PNRC will begin distribution of these supplies immediately upon arrival. USAID/OFDA regional advisors are in Manila, assessing the humanitarian

situation and assisting with coordination between the Government of the Philippines, NGOs, UN agencies, and the U.S. military. OFDA advisors are also actively monitoring Typhoon Parma, tropical storm Melor and one additional tropical depression, which might affect humanitarian conditions and the subsequent USG response.

U.S. Military Aids Sick, Hungry, Clears Roads

¶18. (SBU) On October 1 in Metro Manila's Quezon City, Third Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF) personnel treated almost 800 injured, transported or distributed thousands of packs of food and donated clothing to DSWD distribution centers, and cleared roads of debris. These activities are continuing. Additional U.S. Marine and Navy forces diverted from Talon Vision/PHIBLEX (Philippines Bilateral Exercise) currently en route will augment the III MEF personnel in coming days.

¶19. (SBU) The Ambassador outlined ongoing and upcoming U.S. relief efforts to Presidential Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita in an October 1 meeting, during which Ermita expressed deep appreciation for U.S. assistance. He noted he had briefed the President on USG efforts, which he said helped reinforce for Filipinos the value of their partnership with the United States (Reftel A.)

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Embassy Operations Restored

¶110. (SBU) Management staff has fully restored Embassy compound power and communications. All Embassy offices have reopened, and potable water will be available as soon as laboratory tests confirm its safety.

¶111. (SBU) The Consular Section has received welfare and whereabouts inquiries on behalf of 96 American citizens believed to be stranded in various flood-stricken areas. Staff have located and confirmed the well-being of 68 of these individuals, and provided information on the remaining 28 to the relevant local authorities and continue to follow up with them for information. American Citizen Services (ACS) personnel continue to check casualty lists, attempting to identify American citizens. ACS has issued a warden message regarding the next three tropical depressions headed for the Philippines.

Heavy Media Coverage of U.S. Efforts

¶112. (U) Most major media outlets prominently featured U.S. assistance to the victims of tropical storm Ondoy, highlighting the \$100,000 donated and the participation of U.S. troops and rescue equipment. Three major TV channels covered the Ambassador, USAID and U.S. military personnel distributing U.S.-purchased Philippine National Red Cross relief supplies at an evacuation center in Quezon City. Photos of the Ambassador distributing food packets appeared in the country's eight major dailies, and the Ambassador was quoted describing additional U.S. equipment and personnel en route to the Philippines, as well as the diversion of resources from the joint Philippines-U.S. military Talon Vision/PHIBLEX exercises to relief efforts.

Super Typhoon On the Way?

¶113. (U) Packing sustained winds of 195 kilometers per hour (kph) and gusts of over 230 kph, typhoon Pepeng (international name Parma) is scheduled to hit Luzon Saturday evening, according to Nathaniel Cruz, Deputy Director of the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical services Administration (Pagasa). Rains from the storm's outer rainbands are already falling in southern and central

Luzon.

Comment

¶14. (SBU) Averaging over 20 typhoons a year, the Philippines should be well versed in disaster response. The current calamity demonstrates the limits of its disaster prevention and relief capabilities.

Kenney